



NASW

National Association of Social Workers / Connecticut Chapter

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Testimony on HB: 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination

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Judiciary Committee**

Submitted By: Stephen A. Karp, MSW, Executive Director

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter supports HB 6599: An Act Concerning Discrimination. We urge the 2011 Legislature to finally take this long overdue step of fully protecting persons based on gender identity or expression.

NASW and the social work profession have long been concerned with working to eliminate discrimination in all forms. This commitment is embodied in the NASW Code of Ethics (NASW, 2008) that states "Social workers should not practice, condone, facilitate, or collaborate with any form of discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sexual orientation, *gender identity or expression*, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability" (emphasis added). It is based on this founding ethical principle that we call for passage of HB: 6599.

Transgender people face real discrimination in a variety of aspects of their lives that have damaging effects to them. Discrimination in employment creates economic insecurity that can lead to seeking public financial supports even though the person is fully capable of, and willing to work. Discrimination of transgender people within health care leads to delays in seeking both preventative and acute health services that can lead to increased costs and longer recovery periods once care is attained. Other aspects of discrimination, such in housing, insurance, and attaining credit again leaves the person wrongfully disadvantaged based not on the person's ability but rather solely on their gender identity or expression.

Discrimination permeates a person's life, negatively affecting their social life, their work life, their health and mental health, their economic security, and their sense of self-worth. In the case of transgender persons this discrimination is heightened by the State of Connecticut's lack of statutory language that specifically prohibits discriminatory practices. Because Connecticut state law lacks a legal remedy for transgender persons who have been discriminated against, the state is complicit in the discriminatory act. This Legislature can rectify this missing element of statutory protection by passage of HB 6599.

There is precedence for this needed statutory revision by the 2000 decision of the CT Commission on Human Rights declaring that discrimination based on gender identity or expression constitutes sex discrimination. Furthermore, thirteen states are already ahead of Connecticut by having non-discrimination laws that cover gender identity or expression, including Maine, Vermont and Rhode Island. Major employers, many of whom have employees in Connecticut, prohibit discrimination in the workplace based on gender identity or expression. A decade ago Connecticut was a leader on anti-discrimination of persons based on sexual orientation, by being the third state in the nation to pass a sexual orientation civil rights bill. All of this precedence resulted in protecting certain person's rights without the loss of rights of other groups or individuals. As a state we can again affirm the rights of a group of people, this time transgender people, at no detriment to non-transgender people.

Connecticut is in the second decade of the 21st Century and societal acceptance of the diversity of individuals in our society has greatly advanced. We now must take the next logical step in that acceptance, and protection, of our diverse community by extending non-discrimination rights to transgender people by passing HB 6599.